# UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS EASTERN DIVISION

IN RE:	)	Case No. 16-39654
	)	(Jointly Administered)
ARGON CREDIT, LLC, et al,	)	
	)	Chapter 7
Debtors.	)	
	)	Hon. Deborah L. Thorne
	)	
	)	Hearing Date: January 7, 2021 at 9:00 a.m
	)	

## NOTICE OF MOTION

TO: See attached list

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on January 7, 2021 at 9:00 a.m., I will appear before the Honorable Deborah L. Thorne, or any judge sitting in her place, and present the *Motion for Entry of an Order Pursuant to Bankruptcy Rule 9019 Approving Settlement with Gary Zumski*. Partiesin-interest may obtain a copy of the Motion by contacting undersigned counsel.

This motion will be presented and heard electronically using Zoom for Government. No personal appearance in court is necessary or permitted. To appear and be heard on the motion, you must do the following:

**To appear by video**, use this link: https://www.zoomgov.com/. Then enter the meeting ID and password.

**To appear by telephone**, call Zoom for Government at 1-669-254-5252 or 1-646-828-7666. Then enter the meeting ID and password.

**Meeting ID and password.** The meeting ID and password for this hearing will be provided by chambers at a later date. These credentials can also be found on the judge's page on the court's web site, at https://www.ilnb.uscourts.gov/content/judge-deborah-l-thorne.

If you object to this motion and want it called on the presentment date above, you must file a Notice of Objection no later than two (2) business days before that date. If a Notice of Objection is timely filed, the motion will be called on the presentment date. If no Notice of Objection is timely filed, the court may grant the motion in advance without a hearing.

Dated: December 8, 2020 KAREN R. GOODMAN, CHAPTER 7 TRUSTEE

By: <u>/s/ Elizabeth L. Janczak</u>
One of Her Attorneys

Shelly A. DeRousse, Esq. Elizabeth L. Janczak, Esq. FREEBORN & PETERS LLP 311 South Wacker Drive, Suite 3000 Chicago, Illinois 60606-6677 Telephone: 312.360.6000

Facsimile: 312.360.6520 sderousse@freeborn.comejanczak@freeborn.com

# UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS EASTERN DIVISION

IN RE:	)	Case No. 16-39654
	)	(Jointly Administered)
ARGON CREDIT, LLC, et al,	)	
	)	Chapter 7
Debtors.	)	
	)	Hon. Deborah L. Thorne
	)	
	)	Hearing Date: January 7, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.
	)	

## **CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I, Elizabeth L. Janczak, an attorney, hereby certify that on December 8, 2020, I caused a true and correct copy of the foregoing *Notice of Motion* and *Motion for Entry of an Order Pursuant to Bankruptcy Rule 9019 Approving Settlement with Gary Zumski*, to be filed with the Court and served upon the following parties by the manners listed.

#### **CM/ECF Service List (Notice and Motion)**

Harold Abrahamson aralawfirm@aol.com

Gabriel Aizenberg aizenbergg@gtlaw.com, malisc@gtlaw.com; chilitdock@gtlaw.com;

stibbep@gtlaw.com; mendeloffs@gtlaw.com; ickesp@gtlaw.com

Kimberly Bacher 
Kimberly.Bacher@usdoj.gov, kimberlyabacher@hotmail.com

Paul M Bauch pbauch@lakelaw.com, smohan@lakelaw.com;

5242@notices.nextchapterbk.com

Rachel Blise rblise@foley.com

Michael A Brandess mbrandess@sfgh.com, bkdocket@sfgh.com

Terence Campbell tcampbell@cotsiriloslaw.com, protert@cotsiriloslaw.com

Jeffrey C Dan jeffd@goldmclaw.com

Shelly A. DeRousse sderousse@freeborn.com, bkdocketing@freeborn.com

William J Factor wfactor@wfactorlaw.com, wfactorlaw@gmail.com;

bharlow@wfactorlaw.com; wfactor@ecf.inforuptcy.com; wfactormyecfmail@gmail.com;

factorwr43923@notify.bestcase.com

Jonathan P Friedland ifriedland@sfgh.com, bkdocket@sfgh.com

Matthew T. Gensburg MGensburg@gcklegal.com

Karen R Goodman kgoodman@cranesimon.com, il24@ecfcbis.com;

dkobrynski@cranesimon.com; kgoodman@ecf.axosfs.com; abell-powell@cranesimon.com

Karen R Goodman kgoodman@cranesimon.com, abell-powell@cranesimon.com

E. Philip Groben pgroben@gcklegal.com, bcervantes@gcklegal.com,

rrodriguez@gcklegal.com

Valerie A Hamilton vhamilton@sillscummis.com

Jill M Hutchison jhutchison@cotsiriloslaw.com, bdardar@cotsiriloslaw.com

Elizabeth L Janczak ejanczak@freeborn.com, bkdocketing@freeborn.com

Patrick S Layng USTPRegion11.ES.ECF@usdoj.gov

Derek V. Lofland derekloflandesq@gmail.com

Sara E Lorber slorber@wfactorlaw.com, slorber@ecf.inforuptcy.com;

nbouchard@wfactorlaw.com; bharlow@wfactorlaw.com

Edward Miller edmilleresq@aol.com

Karthik Nagarur knagarur@gmail.com

Jeffrey K. Paulsen jpaulsen@wfactorlaw.com, bharlow@wfactorlaw.com;

jpaulsen@ecf.inforuptcy.com

Nancy A Peterman petermann@gtlaw.com, chilitdock@gtlaw.com; greenbergc@gtlaw.com;

stibbep@gtlaw.com

Lars A Peterson lpeterson@lgcounsel.com

Peter J Roberts proberts@cozen.com, peter-roberts-1301@ecf.pacerpro.com;

cknez@cozen.com

Carolina Y. Sales csales@lakelaw.com, smohan@lakelaw.com;

5241@notices.nextchapterbk.com

Christina Sanfelippo csanfelippo@foxrothschild.com, orafalovsky@foxrothschild.com

Steven S. Shonder Steve@ShonderLegal.com, sshonder@me.com

David M Siegel davidsiegelbk@gmail.com, R41057@notify.bestcase.com;

johnellmannlaw@gmail.com

M. Gretchen Silver ustpregion11.es.ecf@usdoj.gov, gretchen.silver@usdoj.gov;

denise.delaurent@usdoj.gov

Arthur G Simon asimon@cranesimon.com, sclar@cranesimon.com;slydon@cranesimon.com

Michael J. Small msmall@foley.com, thardy@foley.com;DocketFlow@foley.com

Peter S Stamatis peter@stamatislegal.com

Justin R. Storer jstorer@lakelaw.com, 5217@notices.nextchapterbk.com;ECF@Lakelaw.com

Jeffrey Wilens jeff@lakeshorelaw.org

#### **U.S. Mail Service List (Notice of Motion Only)**

See attached mailing matrix.

Case 16-39654 Label Matrix for local noticing 0752-1 Case 16-39654 Northern District of Illinois Eastern Division Tue Dec 8 09:52:59 CST 2020 Argon X LLC 200 W. Jackson Blvd.

Addison Professional Financial Sear 7076 Solutions Center Chicago, IL 60677-7000

American Airlines ICU PO Box 619001 MD2100 Dallas TX 75261-9001

Chicago, IL 60606-6986

Suite 900

Ashley M. Dabney 3116 W. Belmont Ave., Apt. B Chicago, IL 60618-5706

B Money Holdings 2569 College Hill Circle Schaumburg, IL 60173-5204

Barrile, John M 200 W Jackson Chicago, IL 60606-6910

Beattie, Mary 32429 W River Rd Wilmington, IL 60481-9578

Blue Treble Solutions, LLC 2009 Fairoak Ct. Naperville, IL 60565-2842

Broadmark Capital, LLC M. Brandess Sugar Felsenthal Grais & Hammer 30 N. LaSalle St.Ste 3000 Chicago, IL 60602-3481

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> Dale & Gensburg PC 200 W Adams St Ste 2425 Chicago, IL 60606-5251

> Ahmed Belhabib 808 Canyon Terrace Ln. Folsom, CA 95630-1872

Andy C. Warshaw, Esq. 1200 Main St., Suite G Irvine, CA 92614-6749

Ashley Stuart 9137 Ga. Hwy. 135 Naylor, GA 31641-2049

(p) BANK OF AMERICA PO BOX 982238 EL PASO TX 79998-2238

Bates, Birttney T 914 Great Plaines Matteson, IL 60443-2477

Bernard Marsiglia 100 Forest Pl., Apt. 501 Oak Park, IL 60301-1196

Borden, Alea 1312 W George Street Apt 3 Chicago, IL 60657-4102

Brown, Derrick 11615 S Hale Ave Chicago, IL 60643-4821 200 W. Jackson Blvd. Suite 900 Chicago, IL 60606-6986

U.S. Bankruptcy Court Eastern Division 219 S Dearborn 7th Floor Chicago, IL 60604-1702

AmOne Corporation 12331 SW 3rd St Suite 700

Fort Lauderdale, FL 33325-2813

Ashleigh L. Bingham 258 Green St.

Park Forest, IL 60466-1610

Audrey L. Willis Office of the Chapter 13 Trustee, MDAL

Montgomery, AL 36101-0173

P.O. Box 173

Barclays Bank Delaware ERC PO Box 57610 Jacksonville FL 32241

Bates, LaTonya P.O. Box 168 Frankfort, IL 60423-0168

Bethke, John T 6037 W 99th St Oak Lawn, IL 60453-3663

Breen, Brian M 8500 Westberry Ln Tinley Park, IL 60487-7537

Bruce W. Breitweiser 1504 W Washington Street Bloomington, IL 61701

150 John F. Kennedy Pkwy Short Hills, NJ 07078-2703

Case 16-39654 Doc 526 Filed 12/08/20 Entered 12/08/20 10:14:37 Desc Main Budd Larner, P.C.

Byrop Factuarient Page 6 of 21 Calloway, Evelyn Byrop Pactuation Page 6 of 21 1900 S Highland Ave Suite 100 Lombard, IL 60148-4998

5803 W Erie St #3S Chicago, IL 60644-1457

Candace Harison 20 N. Tower Rd. Oak Brook, IL 60523-1126

Canete, Ira V 1050 S School St Lombard, IL 60148-4025 Cardinal Trust 77 W Wacker Dr Suite 3100 Chicago IL 60601-4904

Chapter 13 Trustee, Middle District of Alaba P.O Box 173 Montgomery, AL 36101-0173

Charles Augello 9023 Gardner Dr. Alpharetta, GA 30009-2193 Charles Beattie 35 Woodlake Blvd., Apt. 1205 Gurnee, IL 60031-3279

Chris Walker 4138 Ridgefield Dr. Columbus, GA 31907-6224 Christine Sammons 3250 Cannon Bay Dr. Cumming, GA 30041-7721 Christopher Hinsley 720 Wellington Ave. Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-3366

Clayton Pringle 911 West George St. Banning, CA 92220-4341 Coates, Charles 3535 W Armitage Ave Unit 2F Chicago, IL 60647-3602

Cogent Communications Chicago 221 N. LaSalle Street Chicago, IL 60601-1514

Collins, Keyoma R 2708 Oxford Dr Markham, IL 60428-4762

Commonwealth Edison Co 3 Lincoln Center Attn: Bankruptcy Section Oak Brook Terrace IL 60181-4204 Conversant LLC P.O. Box 849725 Los Angeles, CA 90084-9725

CyberRidge c/o Nortridge Software 2 S. Pointe Dr., Ste 250 Lake Forest, CA 92630-8537

(p) DIRECTV LLC ATTN BANKRUPTCIES PO BOX 6550 GREENWOOD VILLAGE CO 80155-6550 Dabney, Ashley M 3116 W. Belmont Avenue #2 Chicago, IL 60618-5706

Daniels, Panichi 61 W 146th St Riverdale, IL 60827-2853 Data Sales Co., Inc. 3450 West Burnsville Pkwy Burnsville, MN 55337-4203 Deborah Martin 413 Flint Trl Jonesboro, GA 30236-1313

Denise Ortiz c/o Golden & Cardona-Loya LLP 3130 Bonita Road, Ste. 200B Chula Vista, CA 91910-3263

Dennis Nix 24701 Raymond Way Lake Forest, CA 92630-4741

Department of Treasury-Internal Revenue Serv PO Box 7346 Philadelphia, PA 19101-7346

DevBridge Group, LLC. 343 W. Erie St. Suite 600 Chicago, IL 60654-5789

Diekelman, Adam K 511 W Division St #512 Chicago, IL 60610-1826

Douglas Harvey 3836 South Hurt Rd. Smyrna, GA 30082-3518 Drane, Cecelia D 719 N. 7th St. Maywood, IL 60153-1054

Case 16-39654 Doc 526 Filed 12/08/20 Entered 12/08/20 10:14:37 Desc Main Dube Diction Page 7 of 21 226 N Adams St Hinsdale, IL 60521-3126

Enova International, Inc. 175 W. Jackson Blvd. Suite 1000 Chicago, IL 60604-2863

Enova International, Inc. 200 W. Jackson St., 9th Floor Chicago, IL 60606-6986

Erica White 10343 Linder Ave. Oak Lawn, IL 60453-4678 Erickson, Nathan R 655 W Irving Park Rd Apt 1408 Chicago, IL 60613-3136

Ferro, Peter A 2377 Holt Rd Minooka, IL 60447-8912

Fintech Financial, LLC Attn: Mindi Vavra 101 Research Park Dr. Mission, SD 57555

Florian Fox 10606 Charles St. Huntley, IL 60142-7131

Franchise Tax Board Bankruptcy Section MS A340 PO BOX 2952 Sacramento, CA 95812-2952

Fukawa, Kim K 2462 N Orchard St #1 Chicago, IL 60614-2624

Fund Recovery Services, LLC Sills Cummis & Gross, PC Attn: V. Hamilton 600 College Road East Princeton, NJ 08540-6636

Gallop Solutions, Inc. P.O. Box 796575 Dallas, TX 75379-6575

Gary Zumski 4204 E. Frontage Rd. Rolling Meadows, IL 60008-2520 Gonzalez, James R 808 Alann Dr Joliet, IL 60435-3821

Gonzalez, Mayra 4048 S Albany Ave Chicago, IL 60632-2445

Heather Miller 25 Elm Dr. Bethany, IL 61914-9516 Heather Nicholas 11496 Autumn Hill Drive Sandy, UT 84094-5671

Heidi Smith 388 Alicia Ave. Talladega, AL 35160-2945

Hicks, Kevin 4527 W Monroe St Chicago, IL 60624-2519

Howard, Casey K 1624 W Division St #504 Chicago, IL 60622-3833

InContact, Inc. 75 West Towne Ridge Tower 1 Sandy, UT 84070-5528

James Ciesielski 210 N. 14th St. Lanett, AL 36863-6454

James Hansen 2065 East County Rd. 1300 Carthage, IL 62321-3511

Jamillah Omar 8945 S. Dorchester Ave. Chicago, IL 60619-7005

Jandice Tidwell 798 County Rd. 245 Scottsboro, AL 35768-5115

Jason Petty 5263 Highland Trace Circle Birmingham, AL 35215-2872

Jason Sparling 103 East 5th Spring Valley, IL 61362-1420

(p) JEFFERSON CAPITAL SYSTEMS LLC PO BOX 7999 SAINT CLOUD MN 56302-7999

Joann Brooks 2241 Mokingbird Ln. Washington, IL 61571-3338 Joseph Coler 4480 Highwood Park. Dr.

Case 16-39654 Doc 526 Filed 12/08/20 Entered 12/08/20 10:14:37 Desc Main Rami December 12/08/20 Page 8 of 21 3756 Galaway Ct. Moreno Valley, CA 92555

c/o Apollo Legal Services, LLC 3900 N. Lake Shore Dr., #4D Chicago, IL 60613-3462

Krivich, Alexandria N 21847 W Kentwood Dr Plainfield, IL 60544-7050

Atlanta, GA 30344-7051

Lachandra Jones 3539 Oakshire Way Atlanta, GA 30354-3630 Lagina Dardy 1807 Highland Ave., Apt. 1 Dublin, GA 31021-3644

Lakeshore Law Center Jeffrey Wilens, Esq. 18340 Yorba Linda Blvd. No. 107-610 Yorba Linda, CA 92886-4058 Larry McDuffie 134 GlenDale Rd. Leesburg, GA 31763-4714 Latoria Williams 3840 Culver Rd. Tuscaloosa, AL 35401-9511

Lending Tree PO Box 840470 Dallas, TX 75284-0470 Leroy Commander 600 Hunter St. Thomson, GA 30824-1513 LexisNexis Risk Solutions 230 Park Ave. 7th Floor New York, NY 10169-0935

Little Owl 322 E. Michigan St. Suite 302 Milwaukee, WI 53202-5005

Little Owl Argon, LLC 322 East Michigan St., Suite 302 Milwaukee, WI 53202-5005

(p) DSNB MACY S CITIBANK 1000 TECHNOLOGY DRIVE MS 777 O FALLON MO 63368-2222

Madanyan, Harry 6261 W 128th Pl Palos Heights, IL 60463-2325 Marco Boykin-Hunter 649 Candle Ln. Birmingham, AL 35214-4874 Margon LLC Nancy A Peterman 77 W Wacker Suite 3100 Chicago IL 60601-4904

Maria Colindres 6928 Agnes Ave. #4 North Hollywood, CA 91605-6922 Marjorie Fulmer 211 Mantle Dr. Madison, AL 35757-7597 Mark Tiffler Trust 760 Village Center Dr., Ste. 200 32 Ruffled Heathers Lemont, IL 60439-7746

Mark Triffler Declaration of Trust Nancy A Peterman 77 W Wacker Dr Suite 3100 Chicago IL 60601-4904

Martha Fackiner 5123 Brookwood Valley NE Atlanta, GA 30309-1455

Matthew Schmarje 608 Queen Anne St. Woodstock, IL 60098-2841

Mattull, Eric 423 Osage Dr Dyer, IN 46311-2237

McGee, Anthony E 2208 W 121st Place Blue Island, IL 60406-1302 Meghan Hubbard 760 Village Center Drive, Suite 200 Burr Ridge, IL 60527-4507

Merit Management Group LP 760 Village Center Dr. Suite 200A Burr Ridge, IL 60527-4529

Michalski, Rachel M 12933 Norwich St Plainfield, IL 60585-7908 Michelle Waters 249 Silver Ridge Dr. Dallas, GA 30157-8272 Case 16-39654 Doc 526 Filed 12/08/20 Entered 12/08/20 10:14:37 Desc Main MicroBilt Corporation Page 9 of 21 Midland Funding LLC 100 Canal Pointe Blvd., Suite 208 Princeton, NJ 08540-7169

Microbide Lument Page 9 of 21 1640 Airport Rd., Ste. 115 Kennesaw, GA 30144-7038

2365 Northside Drive Suite 300 San Diego CA 92108-2709

Mounce, Tawni L 5117 North Western Ave Apt 1 Chicago, IL 60625-2737

Munsayac, Christian 4904 N Harding Ave Chicago, IL 60625-6105 Nelson, Rebecca 7209 Oneill Rd Downers Grove, IL 60516-3769

Niko Evrard 1868 Stow St. Simi Valley, CA 93063-4265

Noax, LLC 310 E. 90th Dr. Merrillville, IN 46410-7188 Nunn, Marlon T 7765 S South Shore Dr Apt #2 Chicago, IL 60649-5789

Octavio Cardona-Loya II 3130 Bonita Road, Suite 200-B Chula Vista, CA 91910-3263

Office of the U.S. Trustee 219 S. Dearborn St. Room 873 Chicago, IL 60604-2027

Palla Smith 5917 Sunflower Ct. Ellenwood, GA 30294-3891

Park, Rhonda 3531 Stackinghay Dr Naperville, IL 60564-8335

Pasquale Caira 7508 Locust Ln. Plainfield, IL 60586-2550 Patricia Carr 1152 Violet Dr. Birmingham, AL 35215-7224

Paul Kotowski 7101 N. LeClaire Ave. Skokie, IL 60077-3480 Penny Mullis 1878 Cook Ct. Montrose, GA 31065-3237 Peraza Capital Suite 705 StPetersburg, FL 33701

Peraza Capital and Investment, LLC. M. Brandess Sugar Felsenthal Grais & Hammer 30 N. LaSalle St. Ste 3000 Chicago, IL 60602-3481

Percolate Industries 107 Grand St. 2nd Floor New York, NY 10013-5903

Pheareak Phan 25 N. Puente Dr. Tracy, CA 95391-1147

Porche Taylor 1353 Florin Rd. Sacramento, CA 95822-4201

(p) PORTFOLIO RECOVERY ASSOCIATES LLC PO BOX 41067 NORFOLK VA 23541-1067

Princeton Alternative Fund (PAF) 100 Canal Pointe Blvd. Suite 208 Princeton, NJ 08540-7169

Princeton Alternative Income Fund, LP c/o Sills Cummis & Gross, PC Attn: V. Hamilton 600 College Road East Princeton, NJ 08540-6636

Productive Edge, LLC. 11 E. Illinois St. Suite 200 Chicago, IL 60611-5654

RSM 5155 Paysphere Circle Chicago, IL 60674-0001

RSM US LLP 5155 Paysphere Circle Chicago, IL 60674-0001 Renita Briley 50 Roswell Ct. Atlanta, GA 30305-1412 Richard Peterson 247 Talking Rock Trail Dallas, GA 30132-0910

Rik Williamson 1014 W. S. 2nd Shelbyville, IL 62565-1804

Case 16-39654 Doc 526 Filed 12/08/20 Entered 12/08/20 10:14:37 Desc Main Roberto Curritie Int Walker Page 10 of 21 3590 Towanda Dr. Atlanta, GA 30349-2334

12400 Collections Center Drive Chicago, IL 60693-0124

Robert Vaughn 1236 N. Oaklane Rd. Lot 315 Springfield, IL 62707-9771

Roderick Williams 195 Echols Way Acworth, GA 30101-2736 Rossow, Marie E 808 POMEROON ST Apt 306 Naperville, IL 60540-4893

Ruiz, Liza 6149 W Giddings Chicago, IL 60630-2929 Sammons, Samantha K 3420 N Lakeshore Dr. Apt 7N Chicago, IL 60657-2887

Sandra Rheuby 421 Mono Drive Vacaville, CA 95687-5525

Schneider, Lisa 1804 S Racine Ave #4-B Chicago, IL 60608-3214 Schnosenberg, Eric 2830 N Damen Ave Chicago, IL 60618-8204

Seyfarth Shaw LLP 131 S Dearborn St. Suite 2400 Chicago, IL 60603-5577

Shah, Manali 9031 Westminster Dr Woodridge, IL 60517-7545 Sherry Ann Morris 1205 Ridge Vista Ct. Lawrenceville, GA 30043-7019 Sherry Morris Allen Chern/ Douglas R. Lenhardt, Esq. 230 College Ave Athens, GA 30601-2714

Shirley Crowell 2024 Henry Crumrpton Dr. Birmingham, AL 35211-4930 Stacey Gibson 1656 Eddie Jackson Rd. Brewton, AL 36426-3986 Steven Wayne McCormick 80 Reynolds Dr. Rossville, GA 30741-4898

Swoon 8474 Solution Center Chicago, IL 60677-8004 Synchrony Bank /JCP PO Box 960090 Orlando FL 32896-0090

Tachiana Beard 1252 Hardy Point Dr. Evans, GA 30809-5281

Tachiana Beard c/o Brow & Associates, LLC Evans, GA 30809

Thomas Dyess 6740 Spice Pond Ln. Mobile, AL 36613-9320 Thomas Zito 3552 Brookfield Rd. Birmingham, AL 35226-2055

Timothy Miller 25 Elm Dr. Bethany, IL 61914-9516 Tomaszkiewicz, Sean 2009 Fairoak Ct Naperville, IL 60565-2842

Tonya Sasser 1261 Nicole Ave. Atmore, AL 36502-8205

Tonyetta Andrews 601 Creste Dr. Decatur, GA 30035-4134

(p) TRANSUNION 555 W ADAMS CHICAGO IL 60661-3631 Vanessa Waddell 214 Robin Hood Rome, GA 30161-5874

Atn: Billing Department 222 N Sepulveda 18th Floor El Segundo, CA 90245-5614

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Ventatasubramaniam, Shrayase 11 of 21

rtment 350 West Oakdale Avenue #1308 5642 W Melrose St. Garden U

Chicago, IL 60657-5657

5642 W Melrose St. Garden Unit Chicago, IL 60634-4313

Walter Yarbrough 3011 W. 61st

Velocify

Chicago, IL 60629-3248

William Harris 302 West Blackburn Paris, IL 61944-1037

Wolfe, Raviv 571 Vernon Woods Dr. Valparaiso, IN 46385-9106

Woodworth, Allison J 516 W Melrose St Apt 306 Chicago, IL 60657-3787

Yodlee Lockbox Dept CH 17505 Palatine, IL 60055-7405

Zumski, Gary 4204 E. Frontage Rd Rolling Meadows, IL 60008-2520

Brian and Lourdes Bauman 320 N. Aldine Ave.

Park Ridge, IL 60068-3012

E. Philip Groben Gensburg Calandriello & Kanter, P.C.

200 West Adams St., Ste 2425 Chicago, IL 60606-5251

Jeffrey Wilens Lakeshore Law Center 18340 Yorba Linda Blvd. Yorba Linda, CA 92886-4058

Jeffrey C Dan Goldstein & McClintock LLLP 111 West Washington Suite 1221 Chicago, IL 60602-3482

Mia Victoria I. Rocello

Karen R Goodman ESQ Crane, Simon, Clar & Dan 135 South LaSalle Street Suite 3705 Chicago, IL 60603-4101

Matthew T. Gensburg Gensburg Calandriello & Kanter, P.C. 200 W Adams St., Ste. 2425 Chicago, IL 60606-5251

Patrick S Layng Office of the U.S. Trustee, Region 11 219 S Dearborn St Room 873

Chicago, IL 60604-2027

The preferred mailing address (p) above has been substituted for the following entity/entities as so specified by said entity/entities in a Notice of Address filed pursuant to 11 U.S.C. 342(f) and Fed.R.Bank.P. 2002 (g) (4).

Bank of America PO box 982234

El Paso TX 79948-2234

DIRECTV LLC Attn: Bankruptcies POB 6550

Greenwood Village CO 80155-6550

Jefferson Capital System 16 Mcleland Rd Saint Cloud MN 56303

Macy's Card PO Box 8113 Mason OH 45040

(d) Macy's Department Stores PO Box 8218

Mason OH 45040

Portfolio Recovery 120 Corporate Blvd Ste 100 Norfolk VA 23502

(d)Portfolio Recovery Associates LLC POB 41067 Norfolk VA 23541-1067

TransUnion 555 West Adams Street Chicago, IL 60661

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The following recipients may be/have been bypassed for notice due to an undeliverable (u) or duplicate (d) address.

(u)Ad Hoc Committee of Unsecured Creditors	(u)Dale & Gensburg, P.C.	(u)FactorLaw
(u)Fund Recovery Services, LLC	(u)Gensburg Calandriello & Kanter, P.C.	(u) Kutchins, Robbins & Diamond, Ltd.
(u)Little Owl Argon, LLC	(u) Margon LLC	(u)Mark Triffler Declaration of Trust
(u)Morris Anderson & Associates, Ltd.	(u)Peraza Capital and Investment, LLC	(u)Sugar Felsenthal Grais & Hammer, LLP
(u) The Cardinal Trust	(d) American Express National Bank c/o Becket and Lee LLP PO Box 3001 Malvern PA 19355-0701	(u) Joseph Martinez 3746 Morning Glory Ave. AK 99534-8000
(u)Margon LLC, Mark Triffler, Pete Ferro and	(u)Alejandro Camacho	(u)Anitra Aytman Billops
(u)April D. Johnson	(u)Brittney Gale Alaimo	(u)Christina Alston
(u)Dean Sipe	(u)Delilah Jasso Rodriguez	(u)Dennis B. Estrada-Jimenez
(u)Dennis C. Cantrell	(u)Donald Dotson	(u)Eric Shorter

(u) John Fountaine	(u) John K. Brigoli	(u) Joseph Canfora
(u) Joseph N. Roberson	(u) Karen Vinson	(u)Karensa Hutchens
(u)Kim L. King	(u)Latonya D. Kitchen	(u)Lindsay Fore
(u)Lois West	(u)Mark Triffler	(u)Mathew V. Muniz
(u) Matthew Cantor	(u)Michael P. Bailey	(u)Patti M. Couture
(u)Pete Ferro	(u)Rosemary Gonzalez-Lopez	(u)Samantha Rae Wilder
(u)Sharon S. Tatumausbie	(u) Shelly A. DeRousse	(u)Sonja Hallmon
(u)Stephen Craig Brown	(u) Steven Prescott	(u)Theresa Madrigal
(u) Tiffany N. Comfort	(u)Yolanda J. McKinney	End of Label Matrix Mailable recipients 196 Bypassed recipients 56 Total 252

# UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS EASTERN DIVISION

IN RE:	) Case No. 16-39654
	) (Jointly Administered)
ARGON CREDIT, LLC, et al,	)
	) Chapter 7
Debtors.	)
	) Hon. Deborah L. Thorne
	) Hearing Date: January 7, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.
	)

# MOTION FOR ENTRY OF AN ORDER PURSUANT TO BANKRUPTCY RULE 9019 APPROVING SETTLEMENT WITH GARY ZUMSKI

Karen R. Goodman (the "*Trustee*"), the chapter 7 Trustee in the above captioned cases, by and through her undersigned counsel, hereby submits this motion (the "*Motion*") to this Court pursuant to Rule 9019 of the Federal Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure (the "*Bankruptcy Rules*") for entry of an order approving settlement between the Trustee and Gary Zumski ("*Zumski*"). In support of the Motion, the Trustee states as follows:

#### PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. In December 2018, the Trustee (through her predecessor chapter 7 trustee, Eugene Crane) brought an adversary proceeding against seventeen (17) defendants asserting claims for, among other things, breach of fiduciary duty and avoidance and recovery of pre-petition transfers under chapter 5 of the Bankruptcy Code. The Trustee has settled or resolved claims against many of the defendants either piecemeal or through a semi-global settlement, but had not reached settlements with any of the three original founders of Argon Credit, LLC – Raviv Wolfe, Berj Arakelian, and Zumski.

2. The Trustee has now reached a settlement with Zumski, leaving only six (6) remaining defendants in the insider adversary proceeding and resulting in gross settlement proceeds to the estates of \$75,000.00.

# **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

- 3. The Court has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1334 and 28 U.S.C. § 157(a) and Internal Operating Procedure 15(a) of the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois.
  - 4. Venue is proper in this district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1408.
  - 5. The predicate for the relief requested in this Motion is Bankruptcy Rule 9019.

#### **BACKGROUND**

# I. General Case Background

- 6. On December 16, 2016 (the "Petition Date"), Argon Credit, LLC ("Argon Credit") and Argon X, LLC ("Argon X," together with Argon Credit, the "Debtors") filed voluntary petitions for relief under chapter 11 of title 11 of the United State Code (the "Bankruptcy Code").
- 7. On January 11, 2017, the Debtors' bankruptcy cases were converted from cases under chapter 11 to cases under chapter 7.
- 8. Deborah K. Ebner was appointed the interim chapter 7 trustee of the Debtors' estates, but resigned on April 17, 2017.
- 9. Eugene Crane was appointed as interim chapter 7 trustee on April 17, 2017 and confirmed by the Court on July 6, 2017.

- 10. On July 11, 2017, the Court entered an order authorizing Eugene Crane, as chapter 7 trustee, to employ Freeborn as special counsel to, among other things, pursue chapter 5 causes of action on a contingency fee basis. (ECF No. 207).
- 11. On June 1, 2020, the Trustee was appointed as the successor chapter 7 trustee after Mr. Crane's resignation.
- 12. On July 30, 2020, the Court entered an order authorizing the Trustee to retain Freeborn on the same terms as previously approved with respect to Mr. Crane. (ECF No. 505).

#### II. The Insider Adversary

- 13. On December 14, 2018, Mr. Crane, the then-chapter 7 trustee, filed a complaint as case number 18-ap-00947 (the "*Insider Adversary*") against multiple defendants, including Zumski for breach of fiduciary duty and avoidance and recovery of certain transfers under chapter 5 of the Bankruptcy Code. In particular, the complaint alleged that Zumski breached his fiduciary to Argon Credit by, among other things, engaging in a scheme to funnel assets away from the Debtors and their creditors for which he personally benefitted, improperly transferring assets to insiders, and knowingly submitting false or misleading financial reports to the Debtors' secured lender to conceal the transfer of Argon Credit's assets. The Trustee seeks millions of dollars in damages from the named defendants for breach of fiduciary duty.
- 14. The Trustee also asserted chapter 5 claims against Zumski to avoid and recover \$31,664.80 in pre-petition transfers.

#### **III.** The Proposed Settlement

15. Since the filing of the complaints, the Trustee (and her predecessor, Mr. Crane) have been engaged in discussions regarding the merits of the various claims against Zumski and potential settlement. Settlement discussions proved logistically challenging given the number of

total defendants, types of claims asserted, number of different counsel involved, and various procedural postures with some defendants answering, others extending their deadlines, and another moving to dismiss.

- 16. After much back-and-forth, and several exchanges of information and documents, the Trustee and Zumski have entered into a settlement agreement (the "Settlement Agreement") fully resolving the claims asserted in the Insider Adversary. A true and correct copy of the Settlement Agreement is attached hereto as Exhibit 1.
  - 17. The relevant terms of the Settlement Agreement are as follows:
    - Zumski shall pay the Trustee the sum of \$75,000.00 (the "Settlement Sum") in full satisfaction of the claims asserted against him in the Insider Adversary.
    - The Settlement Sum shall be paid in monthly installment payments. Zumski's performance of his payment obligations is secured by his execution of a consent judgment in the amount of \$120,000.00 which shall be enforceable upon an uncured payment default.
    - Zumski shall release the Debtors, their estates, and the Trustee from any and all claims, demands, obligations, debts, and causes of action of every kind or nature, in law or equity, whether now known or unknown, vested or contingency, arising on or before the date of the Settlement Agreement including, without limitation, all claims scheduled or filed against the Debtors' estates and any claim arising from payment of the Settlement Sum pursuant to 11 U.S.C. § 502(h).
    - The Trustee shall release Zumski from any and all claims, demands, obligations, debts, and causes of action of every kind or nature, in law or equity, whether now known or unknown, vested or contingency, belonging to the Debtors or their estates as of the date of the Settlement Agreement including, without limitation, the claims for relief asserted or that could have been asserted in the Insider Adversary.
    - Upon Court approval and the occurrence of the agreement's effective date, the Trustee will dismiss Zumski as a defendant in the Insider Adversary with prejudice.

#### **RELIEF REQUESTED**

18. By this Motion, the Trustee seeks entry of an order approving the Settlement Agreement pursuant to Bankruptcy Rule 9019(a).

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- 19. Pursuant to Bankruptcy Rule 9019(a), "[o]n motion by the trustee and after notice and a hearing, the court may approve a compromise or settlement." Fed. R. Bankr. P. 9019(a). Such settlements should be approved by a court if they are fair and reasonable and in the best interests of the debtor's estate. *See Depoister v. Mary M. Halloway Found.*, 36 F.3d 582, 586 (7th Cir. 1994) ("In conducting a hearing under Rule 9019(a), the bankruptcy court is to determine whether the proposed compromise is fair and equitable and in the best interests of the bankruptcy estate.") (internal citations omitted); *In re Andreuccetti*, 975 F.2d 413, 421 (7th Cir. 1992) (holding that Bankruptcy Rule 9019(a) authorizes the court to approve a settlement if "the settlement is in the best interests of the estate"); *In re Energy Coop., Inc.*, 886 F.2d 921, 926-27 (7th Cir. 1989) (providing that "[t]he benchmark for determining the propriety of a bankruptcy settlement is whether the settlement is in the best interests of the estate"); *In re Griffen Trading Co.*, 270 B.R. 883, 903 (Bankr. N.D. III. 2001), *aff'd*, 270 B.R. 905 (N.D. III. 2001) (citing *LaSalle Nat'l Bank v. Holland (In re Am. Reserve Corp.)*, 841 F.2d 159, 161 (7th Cir. 1987)).
- 20. Compromises are tools for expediting the administration of the case and reducing administrative costs and are favored in bankruptcy. *See Fogel v. Zell*, 221 F.3d 955, 960 (7th Cir. 2000) ("Judges naturally prefer to settle complex litigation than to see it litigated to the hilt, especially when it is litigation in a bankruptcy proceeding the expenses of administering the bankruptcy often consume most or even all of the bankrupt's assets."); *Meyers v. Martin (In re Martin)*, 91 F.3d 389, 393 (3d Cir. 1996) ("To minimize litigation and expedite the administration of a bankruptcy estate, compromises are favored in bankruptcy."); *In re A&C Props.*, 784 F.2d 1377, 1381 (9th Cir. 1986).
- 21. The Court should grant a trustee's request for approval of a settlement except in the very limited circumstance where a proposed settlement "falls below the lowest point in the

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range of reasonableness." *Energy Coop.*, 886 F.2d at 929; *Official Comm. of Unsecured Creditors of Artra Group, Inc. v. Artra Group, Inc. (In re Artra Group, Inc.)*, 300 B.R. 699, 702 (Bankr. N.D. Ill. 2003) (same); *In re Rimsat, Ltd.*, 224 B.R. 685, 688 (Bankr. N.D. Ind. 1997) (providing that the court is required only "to canvas the issues in order to determine whether the settlement falls below the lowest point in the range of reasonableness"); *In re Telesphere Commc'ns, Inc.*, 179 B.R. 544, 553 (Bankr. N.D. Ill. 1994).

22. In determining whether a proposed settlement is appropriate, neither an evidentiary hearing nor a rigid mathematical analysis is required. *Depoister*, 36 F.3d at 586, 588 (evidentiary hearing not required); *In re Energy Coop.*, 886 F.2d at 928-29 (rigid mathematical analysis of settlement values not required); *In re Am. Reserve Corp.*, 841 F.2d at 163 (mini-trial not required). Rather, the Seventh Circuit offers the following guidelines:

Central to the bankruptcy judge's determination is a comparison of the settlement's terms with the litigation's probable costs and probable benefits. Among the factors the bankruptcy judge should consider in [the] analysis are the litigation's probability of success, the litigation's complexity, and the litigation's attendant expense, inconvenience, and delay.

Am. Reserve Corp., 841 F.2d at 161 (citations omitted).

- 23. The proposed settlement with Zumski satisfies this standard. Zumski has agreed to pay the Debtors' estates the sum of \$75,000.00 and waive all claims against the estates.
- 24. While the Trustee has asserted claims in the millions of dollars, the Trustee submits that this settlement is well within the reasonable range of possible litigation outcomes taking into account the potential defenses Zumski may have and, in particular, the Trustee's likelihood of recovering more against Zumski.
- 25. The Trustee previously reached a semi-global settlement with other defendants which exhausted the funds remaining in Argon Credit's director's and officer's liability insurance policy. The remaining defendants, including Zumski, must therefore pay any further

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costs of defense and settlement funds out of their own pockets. Zumski has provided the Trustee with information sufficient to satisfy the Trustee that even if she were to obtain a substantial judgment against Zumski, she would be unlikely to recover that amount in full.

- 26. Moreover, Fund Recovery Services, LLC ("FRS"), the Debtors' pre-petition secured lender, has recently filed a complaint in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois as case number 1:20-cv-05730 against many of the same defendants named in the Insider Adversary, including Zumski. FRS's complaint asserts numerous causes of action including claims under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act and seeks hundreds of millions of dollars in damages. This action further reduces the likelihood of the Trustee receiving a substantial recovery against Zumski because, at a minimum, Zumski will be forced to pay to defend this litigation as well and likely could not afford to repay such a substantial judgment to FRS.
- 27. The Trustee submits that the proposed settlement is appropriate under the circumstances because it allows the Trustee to avoid the costs of litigation which are likely to be substantial and avoid the uncertainty associated with litigation and a potentially difficult recovery. In short, the Trustee believes that the settlement maximizes the value of the estates while minimizing the expenses incurred.
- 28. Accordingly, the Trustee submits that the Court should approve the Settlement Agreement pursuant to Bankruptcy Rule 9019(a).

#### **NOTICE**

29. The Trustee has served notice of this Motion on the Debtors, U.S. Trustee, and all creditors pursuant to Bankruptcy Rule 2002 and stated that copies of the complete Motion may

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be obtained from counsel for the Trustee upon request. The Trustee submits that such notice is appropriate under the circumstances.

**WHEREFORE**, the Trustee respectfully requests that the Court enter an order: (i) approving the Settlement Agreement with Zumski, and (ii) granting such other and further relief as this Court deems just and proper.

Dated: December 8, 2020 KAREN R. GOODMAN, CHAPTER 7 TRUSTEE

By: /s/ Elizabeth L. Janczak
One of Her Attorneys

Shelly A. DeRousse, Esq. Elizabeth L. Janczak, Esq. FREEBORN & PETERS LLP 311 South Wacker Drive, Suite 3000 Chicago, Illinois 60606-6677 Telephone: 312.360.6000

Facsimile: 312.360.6520 sderousse@freeborn.com ejanczak@freeborn.com